

(or perhaps rather reversing) a 'privatization of security', where the state has ceased to provide domestic security and the citizens hence have taken 'the law' in their own hands, most often in the form of hand-guns.

### Conclusion

We have thus seen that while some Cold War arms control schemes have been rendered obviously

irrelevant by the end of the Cold War, there is still a role to play for arms control and defence restructuring in the new Europe. The purpose would be the traditional one of arms control, namely to prevent wars, both international and intra-state, and to limit their destructiveness, should they nevertheless occur. As Mark Twain might have put it, 'the rumours of the irrelevance of arms control and NOD are much exaggerated'.

## The Italian Ost-Politik

Viktor Tadić

Since about the beginning of the year the phrase "eastern policy" or Ost-Politik has been appearing with more and more frequency in the Italian media. It relatively quickly entered the political vocabulary of Farnesina (Italian foreign affairs ministry), while those in the know observe that it was invented by the current under-secretary in the same ministry, Piero Fassino. The phrase both conceptually and verbally depicts the Italian political initiative, the new political course that, as a Mediterranean regional power, it is projecting towards the countries in ex-Yugoslavia, to Slovenia and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia and Macedonia, as well as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and from there to the countries of the ex-USSR.

### The rise of the Italian "eastern policy"

"An Italian eastern policy really does exist". This was expressly confirmed by Fassino himself in the middle of January this year. At a time when Belgrade was alight with demonstrations against Milošević, Fassino stated that the winds that were blowing through the Balkans, thinking mainly of

Serbia, showed to what extent central and south east Europe was crucial for the future of the whole of the continent. The creation of a new security architecture in the Balkan region had its own focus, for by the end of the century the EU and NATO would spread towards that region. In this context, in Fassino's opinion, key topics in this part of Europe, like for example immigration and the fight against international crime, would also lead to the necessity for Italy to have closer ties with the countries of central and eastern Europe. Fassino also mentioned the interdependence of Italy and the countries of central and eastern Europe, the long-standing cultural links and the very considerable political relations, particularly in recent times, between Italy and some of the countries of this region, all of which suggests the need for closer collaboration in both economics and culture. It gets stressed that in the countries of the central and eastern region, Italy is the second most important trading partner, and that it is the number one partner for Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. In this context the Foreign Report of the respected London weekly *The Economist* had a headline at the beginning of November last year that ran "The surprising Italians", referring to the initiatives of Italian foreign politics with respect to central and eastern Europe.



Fassino, then, does not deny that there is an Italian Ost-Politik created in Farnesina, backing it up by reference to the Italian involvement in Bosnia and in the Contact Group for the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. He stresses Italian support for the expansion of the EU and NATO to the east, wishing to avoid new walls being put in the way of certain countries. He mentions enhanced tri-lateral collaboration among Italy, Slovenia and Hungary, which, as he said, Austria, Croatia and Slovakia have already expressed the desire to join in. In this context it is necessary to note the attention that Italy paid to the events in Belgrade when the "democratic crash" came, which other central European countries had gone through in 1989/90. The visit at the time of the Italian foreign minister, Lamberto Dini, to Belgrade and the attempt at an agreement between the opposing sides at the beginning of December 1996 also speaks of the Italian involvement in eastern Europe. Italian strategy in central and eastern Europe is a confirmation, in Fassino's opinion, that Italy can, and does, have a foreign policy capable of affirming specific national interests and competing in the definition of the European and international order.

Illustrating the political strategy towards eastern Europe, Fassino sees the driving force of Italian eastern policy in the excellently taken positions in the east European area in recent years, irrespective of the lack of or weakness of a systematic logic. This lack can be corrected, says Fassino, by consistent political and democratic action. The new and frenetic Italian diplomacy in this strategic area is intelligible if one bears in mind the danger of the region being given over to the economic and financial monoculture of the Germans. For this reason, Fassino has made a tour of all the countries of central and eastern Europe save for Bulgaria, where he will go when conditions allow.

The discovery of central and eastern Europe came as no surprise, nor was it a matter of Italy suddenly falling in love with the region. It is, in Fassino's opinion, an observation of the reality that is the heart of all the processes that are redefining the identity of Europe itself. Soon, he said, many of these countries will be part of the EU and NATO, and for this reason Italy has to create an appropriate position for itself, seeing that it is, after Germany, from the Baltic to Bulgaria, the most powerful economic power.

### **A tri-lateral initiative with "former enemies"**

The Italian press noted in February the meeting of representatives of Italy, Slovenia and Hungary in Rome, where Italy proposed the creation of a joint military force that would be formed by "former enemies" who now want to join NATO, having in mind Hungary, once part of the Warsaw Pact, and Slovenia, once in non-aligned Yugoslavia. The question had already been discussed at a technical level was to be put to the defence ministers of Italy, Hungary and Slovenia, the plan fitting into the framework of "enhanced co-operation" known in the diplomatic vocabulary as a "tri-lateral initiative".

Under Secretary in the Italian foreign affairs ministry Piero Fassino who met with his Hungarian and Slovene opposite numbers, made it clear that the final decision about military collaboration was not yet defined, and that co-operation between the three nations assumed other forms as well — in culture, transport, defence, the environment and the fight against crime. The initiative for the creation of the trilateral task-force was important as an anticipation of the desired entry of Slovenia and Hungary into NATO. This is a matter of entries, said Fassino, that Italy is very much in support of, hoping that these two countries would enter NATO with the first group of country-candidates. And that is, among other things, the general political result of the diplomatic forcing that is known by the phrase the Italian new Ost-Politik.

In recent months Fassino, Dini, Andreatta and Prodi have successively visited countries in central eastern and south eastern Europe. Italy has decided to invest political and economic resources in the region and offer its neighbours, above all Slovenia and Hungary, its international political support, expecting from them in return preferential treatment of Italy in culture and economics. An initiative has been announced for the creation of a so-called joint task force so as to speed up the entry of Hungary and Slovenia into the EU and in parallel into NATO. The relationship *à trois* has been stepped up in the meantime in all regions. In May the heads of government of Italy, Hungary and Slovenia met in Budapest — Romano Prodi, Gyula Horn and Janez Drnovšek. At this meeting, as had been expected, the leading say was had by Italy. In Budapest the three signed a declaration expressing the hope and wish that the next meeting of the Atlantic Council, to be held in Madrid, would give clear indi-



cations with respect to the NATO question, and that Slovenia and Hungary would be included in the first round of invitations to join the Atlantic pact.

Current events in Croatia and FR Yugoslavia, that is the demonstrations in Zagreb (Radio 101) and in Belgrade (anti-Milošević) at the end of November and the beginning of December 1996 also encouraged Fassino to make statements. He said that he had met Milošević in the second part of November and had long talks with him, talks which in the light of what was going on in the squares of the Balkans (strikes in Belgrade) were a reliable thermometer for the fever that was growing in Belgrade and Zagreb, and a hint of future scenarios. Fassino is of the opinion that the post-war phase undeniably opens up new perspectives and is favourable to the political dialectic that the war smothered and postponed.

"Perhaps we are about to see a democratic transition that has happened already in the other states of eastern Europe," said Fassino. Still, Fassino thinks that the demonstrations in Belgrade and Zagreb can not lead to any instability in these countries and threaten the painstaking process of finding peace. He would like it to turn out differently. If the peace continues to hold, he said, there will be the more room for democracy. Peace and democracy are not and do not have to be in opposition. It is desirable for the opposition to keep their actions within the limits of peaceful confrontation and that the regimes should recognise the need for change if they want to enter the international community fully.

Fassino does not talk of the collapse but of the development of democracy, which is the final end of the peace, and has to be the fruit of stability, renewal and coexistence among the peoples in ex-Yugoslavia. This, thinks Fassino, is the most authentic and broadest meaning of the Dayton agreement: the attainment of peace as a precondition for the creation and functioning of democratic institutions.

### **The priorities of the Italian Ost-Politik**

As far back as summer last year, Fassino's eastern policy was attacked by the representatives of the neo-right in Italy, who accused him of softness in relations with the Slovenes, and particularly with the Croats. Fassino stated that such a critical attitude was not in line with real Italian policy towards central

Europe and the Balkans. For this reason he stressed the government line, when he said that central and Balkan Europe were absolutely priority strategic regions for Italy, whether for well known reasons of security and stability, or whether because of the economic and trade links in which Italy was the number one or two partner in the region (in competition with Germany), or whether because of the strong cultural and historical links that had tied Italy for decades to the region. Italy would be capable of being a bridge between central Europe and the EU.

This priority was translated, in Fassino's thinking, into a precise strategy, which can be seen in: an active role in the handling of the peace process in ex-Yugoslavia (confirmed by the success of the Florence conference and the presence of Italians in IFOR), in a constant and visible presence in the capitals of the region in order to encourage dialogue among the parties, and the renewed launching of the central European initiative as an instrument of regional integration. Apart from that, there is also the growth in bilateral collaboration and support for European and Atlantic integration as an essential factor for the consolidation of democracy in these countries.

It is in this context that Fassino places relations with Croatia and Slovenia, neighbouring countries that Italy is closely connected with and with which Italy wishes to develop better and better conditions for co-operation. A part of this policy of integration is full protection for the rights of the Italian minorities, not because Italy has got any nostalgic demands to make, but because the recognition of the *de iure* and *de facto* rights of minorities is a measure of the degree of democracy and civilisation of every country.

According to Fassino, a moderate and linear stance has been adopted towards Croatia, with which, as he says, Italy wants step up relations in order to serve three aims: encourage Croatia towards a full implementation of Dayton, for only if Zagreb (and Belgrade, and Sarajevo) feels fully responsible, will the peace last; to encourage everything that will make Croatia more European, so as to consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and, finally, ensure full protection, in principle and in fact, for the Italian community of Istria.